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HISTORICAL CRITICISM AND THE WAR

The expected has happened. Every champion of reaction and obscurantism declares that the war is the outcome of German higher criticism. Germans, they say, first undertook to break down faith in the Bible in order that they might break down the peace of the world. The only hope that is left to the church of Christ is a return to the theories of verbal inspiration, a belief in the end of the world and the speedy coming of Christ.

Nothing could be more absurd. The theology of the Kaiser is not the theology of the modern theological world. It is the theology of orthodoxy and of confessionalism. The God he sets forth is the same God that the theological reactionary presents. He is not the God of Jesus; he is not the God of the prophets. He is the God of the persecutor. He is the God to whom Luther appealed when he justified the slaughter of the peasants; the God summoned to justify the imprisonment of Grotius, the persecution of Crypto-Calvinists, the execution of John of Barneveldt.

The war is an outstanding evidence of the bankruptcy of orthodoxy as a moral force among nations. The theology which is preached by these reactionaries is the same theology which has justified every war which has been fought since the days of Christ. It is born of a misuse of the Scripture, an unwillingness to face the moral demands of Jesus, and a denial of the supremacy in history of a God of love and justice.

Literalism is the court of appeal of men who refuse to pray for the triumph of American arms, and who prefer a Messiah of the Jews to the Christ who himself refused to be called the Son of David.

Historical criticism has not given rise to German worship of force. It has opened the way to a true understanding of how to do

justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly before a God who is the God of Amos and Hosea, of Isaiah and Jesus.

The effort to identify the historical study of the Bible with German *Kultur* elevates a theory of inspiration above a faith in the God of law and love, and limits the moral power of Jesus to the rescue of individuals from vulgar sins.

Such religious teaching as is now organizing prophetic conferences and damning an honest and intelligent use of the Scripture is ruining the church and hindering the spread of a genuinely Christian civilization.

Such propaganda so misuses the Bible as to make it a menace to genuinely religious faith. To identify it with piety is to make piety pre-Christian. To demand that the doctrines which it draws from its perversions of inspiration shall become the dominant rule of the church is to make it certain that the church will become composed of groups of men and women who are a hindrance to the spread of the gospel of Jesus. Literalism threatens the very heart, not only of the Christian religion, but of civilization. A theology under which the present war was possible holds out no promise of lasting peace.

Only he who approaches the Scripture in sympathy with the historical method is capable of intelligently applying its revelation of God to the world in which we live.

The call is coming from all the world for a new recognition and a proper understanding of the Bible. The world can never be saved by the theology of the past. The church cannot be saved unless it faces the future with a conviction that it has a God as big as its ethical task, and a Bible with an inspiration that refuses to be curtailed by a theory that was born in the Dark Ages and organized in the years of brutality and international injustice.